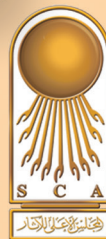


THE CACHETTE OF KARNAK

A Research Project
on Georges Legrain's Discoveries
between 1903 and 1907



conducted by
the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities
and the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology

www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette



Portrait of Georges Legrain and his wife taken in front of their house at Karnak in 1897.

A FRENCH ARCHAEOLOGIST IN THE SERVICE OF KARNAK GEORGES LEGRAIN

GEORGES LEGRAIN, born in Paris in 1865, studied drawing and Egyptology before leaving for Egypt in 1892 as a member of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology, where he assisted J. De Morgan in his excavations and surveys. In 1894, De Morgan appointed him Inspector-Artist of the Service of Antiquities, and then as director of works at Karnak in the fall of 1895. Although only thirty years old, his qualities as a field archaeologist had placed him at the helm of the vast operations at one of the most prestigious sites in Egypt.

The task facing the young archaeologist was immense, because the site was still largely covered with rubble. By organizing the intervention of hundreds of local *sebbakhin*, farmers exploiting the rich agricultural fertilizer from archaeological fields, G. Legrain cleared a large part of Karnak, both in the central part of the temple and along its precinct walls, in order to establish the ground-plan of the complex. These operations sometimes led to the discovery of unknown temples and hundreds of objects. Meanwhile, the monuments were restored, the statues put back in their original location and new inscriptions recorded. Some unforeseen circumstances increased the workload of G. Legrain, as for example in October 1899, when eleven columns of the great Hypostyle hall suddenly collapsed. He began immediately to dismantle and restore them, using ramps made of earth and rubble to move the huge stones of the building. The French archaeologist worked tirelessly at Karnak until 1915, when the consequences of the First World War led to the suspension of work. He was then appointed as inspector of Upper Egypt. As he was overseeing works designed to protect Luxor temple from a high flood, he suffered a sudden illness and died a few days later, on August 22, 1917.

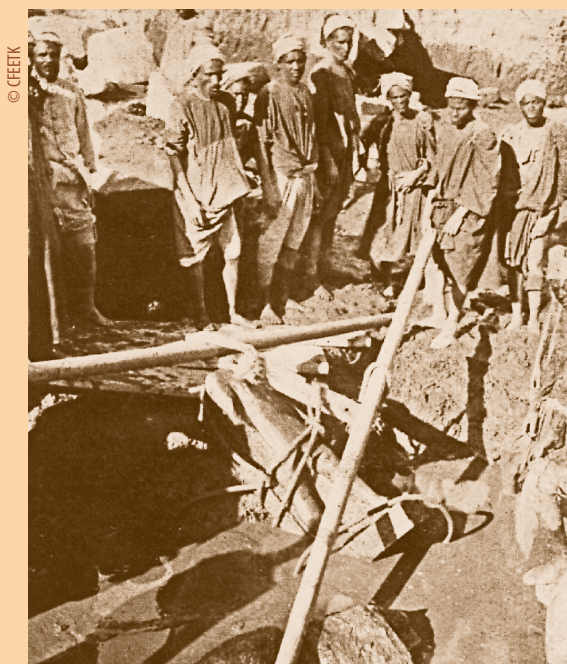
THE EXCAVATION OF THE CACHETTE A WORK OF PHARAONIC PROPORTIONS



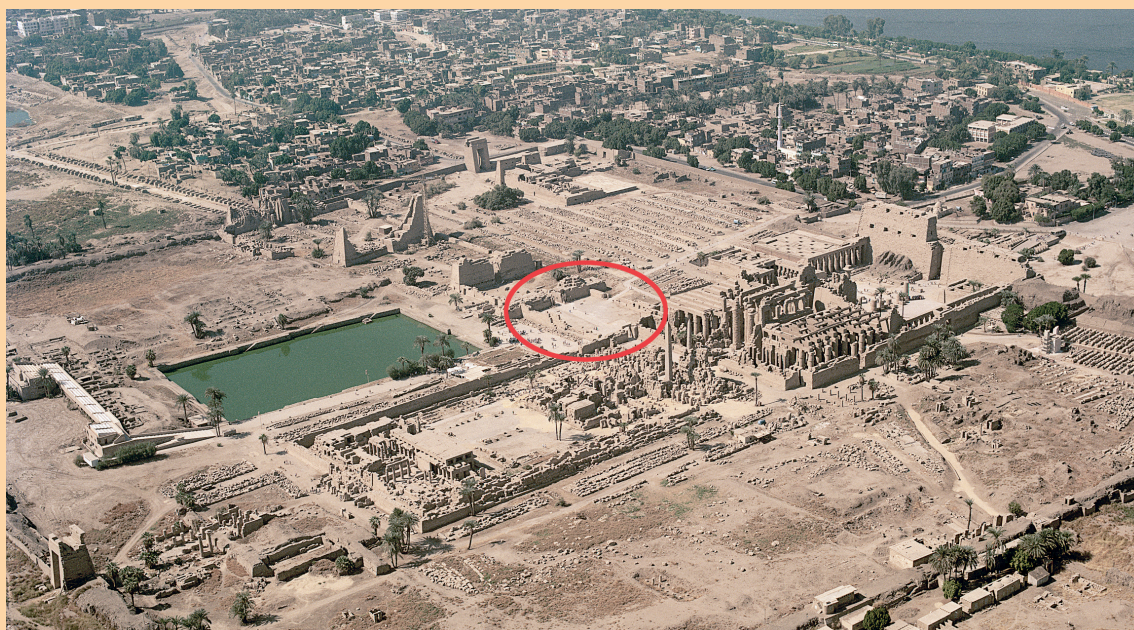
Stela of Seti I found at the opening of the Cachette. Cairo CG 34501.

GASTON MASPERO, who became head of the Department of Antiquities in 1899, ordered G. Legrain to explore the courtyard of the seventh pylon at Karnak, strategically positioned at the intersection of the two axes of the temple. The work began in October 1901, focusing first on the side walls and around the pylon. It quickly led to the discovery of many blocks from the Middle and New Kingdoms, including a limestone door of Amenhotep I. After a break of several months devoted to classifying these blocks, Legrain continued excavations in the northern part of the courtyard. The opening of the Cachette was discovered on December 26, 1903, when G. Legrain's workers found a large stela of Seti I (Cairo CG 34501) upon a layer of pure sand. Under this layer, they found three statuettes and then several others.

Since that day, more than eight hundred statues, many assorted objects, and close to seventeen thousand bronze statues were found across four campaigns between 1903 and 1907. The Cachette was incredibly deep. On May 27, 1905, Legrain wrote to Maspero: "We are reaching now a depth of 15 or 16 meters (it can give you vertigo from on top!), and we are still making finds!" Infiltrations from the water table made excavations extremely difficult. Pumps and *shadufs* were used to evacuate the water, an operation which had to be repeated each morning. The workers were literally fishing for statues in the mud. The incredulous reaction of one of many distinguished tourists to have visited Legrain's excavations at that time is symptomatic: "Do you really mean to say that some object of value may be found in that muddy water in which those half-naked men are splashing about?" Unfortunately, the exact position of each monument from the Cachette could not always be precisely recorded under such conditions.



A statue of King Merenptah being extracted from the muddy water by Legrain's workers in February 1904.



Aerial view of Karnak with indication of the location of the courtyard of the VIIIth pylon, the so-called « courtyard of the Cachette ».



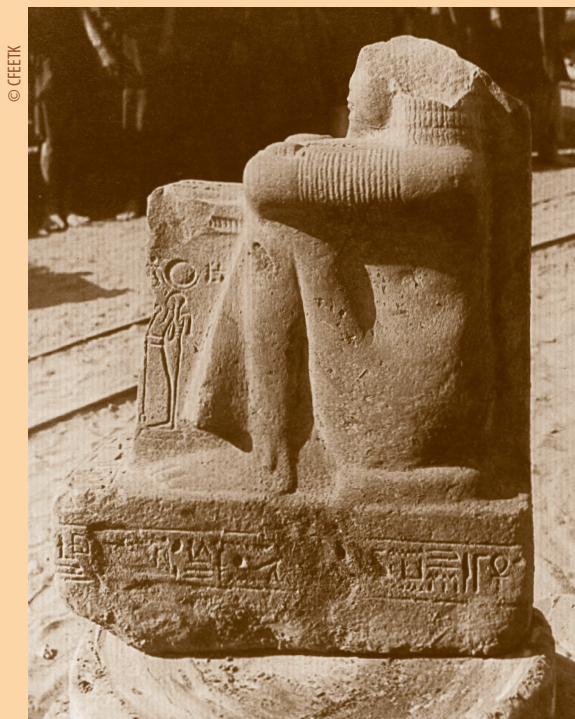
The excavation of the Karnak Cachette : view of the site showing the shadufs used to remove water. February 1905. Cl. Thédénat collection.

G. LEGRAIN AND "HIS" STATUES: THE PASSION OF AN ARCHAEOLOGIST, PHOTOGRAPHER AND EPIGRAPHER

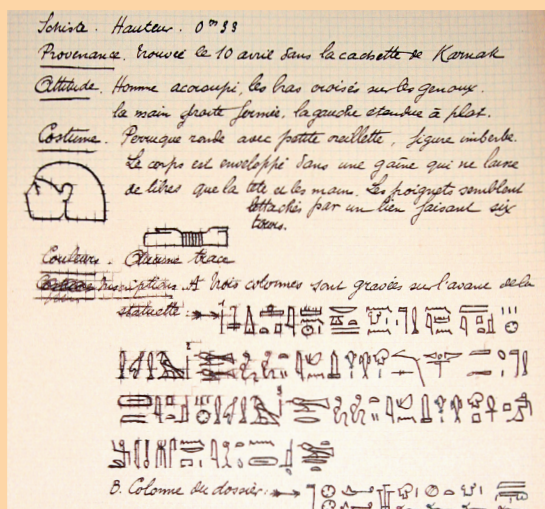
DESPITE the large scale and difficulties of the excavations, G. Legrain was solely responsible for the operations, in addition to personally photographing, recording, and copying the inscriptions. He was often the first to understand their historical significance. The loving relationship he had with the statues he discovered is reflected in his own words:

"Each of them has, at least for me, its history and I have my favorites among them, those which remind me of the moment filled with incomparable emotion when the worker took the statuette out of the mud and passed it to me. We would then wash it like a newborn baby, and as I would remove the mud that covered it, the features of his smiling face and its frail silhouette would appear. Then I would decipher the name of its owner from among the inscriptions that covered it, and that's how I made the acquaintance of kings, princes, high priests of Amun, the whole clergy of the god of Thebes, as well as other rich citizens."

G. Legrain devoted all his energies to finding the missing fragments of incomplete statues and documenting all his findings as best he could before they were shipped quickly to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, either by train, or by river on the *dahabieh* of the Service of Antiquities. On site, he took great care in numbering the objects (using the so-called "K" numbers), registering them in his excavation journal (unfortunately now lost), and taking photographs of them. A large number of these photographs taken soon after the statues' discovery have been preserved. G. Legrain also used squeezes to record inscriptions on the monuments of Karnak: such squeezes were first identified in the archives of the Franco-Egyptian Center at Karnak in the 1980's, and some were found to have been made on objects found in the Cachette. G. Legrain also systematically recorded the inscriptions of the statues, intending these hand copies to serve as a basis for the eventual publication of his catalogues. Those handwritten sheets, now mostly kept at the Egyptian Museum, exemplify his method: they were first written at Karnak and then corrected and edited by the author at the Museum. Three volumes of the *Catalogue général* of the Egyptian Museum dealing with statues and statuettes mostly found in the Cachette were published between 1906 and 1914. Due to the untimely death of the French archaeologist, the systematic publication of his finds was never completed.



Statue of Bakenkhons (K 39, Ramesside period)
photographed by Legrain soon after its discovery.



Handwritten notes written by Legrain concerning the statue K 611
(now kept in Glasgow) including a copy of its inscriptions.

BURIED STATUES WHICH BECAME AMBASSADORS OF KARNAK IN EGYPT AND WORLDWIDE



Statuette of Amun carried on a veiled bark.
Cairo JE 38171.



A rare preserved bronze statue
of Osiris found in the Cachette.
Cairo JE 38376.



Statue of cynocephalus seated on a platform with five steps.
Cairo JE 36781.



Stela with representation of the Hathor cow in the papyrus,
dedicated by Pa-ka and Ta-neferet. Cairo JE 37896.



The vast majority of objects found in the Karnak Cachette ended up in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The recent development of provincial museums in Egypt has led to the transfer of some of them to Luxor, Aswan, Alexandria, Port Said, Ismailia, Beni Suef, Kharga, and elsewhere. Yet the influence of this corpus is not confined to Egypt. G. Legrain and G. Maspero donated some pieces to prestigious visitors, some were sold, while others escaped the excavator's surveillance after their discovery and fell into the hands of art dealers. In the end, a large number of museums in the world house one or more pieces from the Karnak Cachette. Among the larger collections are the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, and the British Museum in London.



Block statue of a Theban priest of the Ptolemaic Period, called Irethorru.
Cairo T.R. 15/12/24/1.



Apart from a number of royal effigies of all periods, the statues primarily belong to the priests who officiated at Karnak from the New Kingdom to the end of the Ptolemaic period. Therefore, the Cachette provides a wealth of information on the clergy and the evolution of local cults. Genealogies of Theban families can be reconstructed from statues belonging to different generations. For art history, the contribution is equally remarkable, as many types of sculpture are represented. In addition, many small objects of all kinds (stelae, inlay plaques, amulets, votive cubits, etc.) were found by G. Legrain during these excavations. The contribution of the Cachette to our knowledge of Egyptian civilization and its influence is very considerable and continues to renew itself. In 2004, nearly 25 masterpieces found by Legrain were put on display in an exhibition held in Grenoble and Cairo in honor of the centennial of the discovery of the Cachette. They were mostly unpublished until then...



Seated statue of Neferhotep II Mersekhemre. Cairo CG 42023.

THE IFAO-SCA DATABASE: AN ON-LINE INVENTORY OF THE CACHETTE



THE PROJECT to create a database on the Karnak Cachette began with the observations that there was no complete inventory of the finds of G. Legrain and that the objects as well as the related documentation were widely dispersed, preventing any overall perspective or diachronic research. Only a modifiable database could provide updated information on each object while providing an overview of all objects from the Cachette, allowing users to search this corpus according to various criteria. This inventory should also serve to better understand the *raison d'être* and historic circumstances surrounding the creation of the Karnak Cachette. From the very first discoveries, G. Legrain sought to establish the date on which the Cachette had been created and paid close attention to the latest objects he found. He suggested that the

burial must have taken place in the last decades of the first century BC, when the Theban region had experienced major troubles. Since then, nobody has become sufficiently acquainted with the deposit to challenge the excavator or to corroborate his conclusions.

Launched in 2006, the Karnak Cachette Database has benefited from the cooperation agreement signed by the SCA and IFAO which led to the publication of the database on-line in November 2009 (www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette), and this database has been regularly updated thereafter. The first version of this database provides, insofar as possible, a general description of each object (with dimensions, materials, dating), a label, the date of discovery, different inventory numbers, and a bibliography. Additional comments concerning the "K number" assigned to each object and other issues have been included. A second version of the database is currently in preparation. It will include more detailed prosopographical data (including titles) and more extensive iconographic documentation. This database aims to become an essential resource for various Egyptological disciplines (history, prosopography, art history, history of religions, philology) based on this corpus. It is also intended to be a collaborative platform for researchers worldwide, and in order to encourage such scientific exchanges, an international colloquium on the Cachette has been organized to take place in Luxor in January, 2011.

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE - LE CAIRE
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KARNAK CACHETTE

Critères de recherche

français english
base cachette
introduction aide
remerciements
nouvelles
www.ifao.egnet.net

Hathor, CK 950

Recherche rapide/identifiant

N° K (Legrain)

Musée du Caire: JE, CG, RT ou SR

Autres localisations, N° inventaire

Type objet, matière, remarques

Période, dynastie, règne

Auteur(s):(année), revue, collection

Chercher

masquer la recherche

1217 références (82 pages)

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11 - 12 - 13 - 14 - 15 - 16 - 17 - 18 - 19 - 20 - Suivant - Fin

CK 1, Groupe statuaire de Sn-nfr et Sn(t)-n(3)jy. Caire CG 42126
K 1 Granit "noir" Nouvel Empire / 18e dyn. / Amenhotep II



ESTABLISHING A RICH PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

THE RICH collection of photographs gathered since 2006 in the digital archives of the IFAO has been an indispensable instrument for collecting data. More than 8,000 photographs are now available. These images of objects from the Cachette come mainly from two sources. The first is the Corpus of Late Egyptian Sculpture (CLES) housed at the Brooklyn Museum. The purpose of the CLES, created in 1950 by B. v. Bothmer, H.-W. Müller and H. De Meulenaere, was to identify, document and study the royal and private statuary of the Late Period. Each item (= sculpture or fragment) was numbered, carefully described, and photographed. About 450 statues from the Karnak Cachette were included in the CLES. With the kind cooperation of Dr. R. Fazzini, curator at the Brooklyn Museum, and the permission of Dr. Wafaa el-Saddik, director of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, about 5,000 photographs taken by B. v. Bothmer were scanned by an IFAO team in October-November 2006. Secondly, as a result of the cooperation agreement concerning this project signed by the IFAO and SCA in 2008, a documentation campaign was launched at the Egyptian Museum, with priority given to items previously undocumented or incompletely photographed. More than 400 objects were photographed between 2008 and 2010 by the IFAO photographic service headed by A. Lecler.

Other archives have been consulted, such as the 'Fotothek' of the German Institute in Cairo, thanks to the kindness of Dr. D. Raue, or those of various museums (for example, that of Hanover, thanks to Dr. Chr. Loebe). An extensive catalog of historic photographs from the Cachette excavations, including pictures of statues at the time



Photograph taken by B.v. Bothmer for the CLES
block statue of Iahmes, son of Pakharkhons
now kept at the National Museum of Alexandria, no. 116.

of their discovery, had already been published by M. Azim and G. Réveillac in 2004. We were able to collect some additional views, such as those of the Thedenat albums kept at the Louvre, thanks to E. David, in charge of these archives, and G. Andreu, chief curator of Egyptian Antiquities.

HIDDEN OR... INACCESSIBLE TREASURES

THE PREPARATION of the inventory of the Cachette has led to substantial additions to the corpus of known objects from the discovery. Some of them, originally kept in the office of G. Legrain at the Egyptian Museum, had been subsequently transferred into the basement. Building on the patient work of Miss Sabah Abd al-Raziq, the curator in charge of these storerooms, we were able to study, record, and photograph these objects. Some of them only bear a "Special Register" number, an internal numbering system used by the curatorial staff, and had thus far escaped attention. However, some items mentioned by G. Legrain in his excavation reports are still missing. The most spectacular case involves the 17,000 bronze statuettes found in the Cachette during the first three seasons of excavations but which still have not been recovered. It has also been important to include in the inventory a number of fragile items found by G. Legrain which did not survive exposure to the air. In his report of the second season, the French archaeologist mentioned numerous wooden objects - chests, furniture, statues - which, despite his efforts, could not be preserved when they were taken out of the wet soil where they stayed for centuries. However, this find was of major importance, because what G. Legrain found was probably a large sample of the furniture used in the temple at the time the



Head of a king wearing the nemes, probably found in 1905.
Cairo T.R. 20/11/24/10.

Cachette was created. He spoke of a « real bench of furniture and wooden statues, of around ten cubic meters ». Similarly, he mentioned the discovery of many animal mummy remains whose fate remains unknown to us. Faced with the mysteries posed by these vanished or lost objects, research for manuscripts or photographs left by the excavator and his contemporaries proves essential to us, though of uncertain outcome. The recovery of Legrain's excavations diaries in which he carefully recorded his findings would restore to Egyptology a precious source of information, and one can only hope that these archives - whose trail was lost some years after the death of the excavator - might resurface one day. Ironically, when two Egyptian inspectors, Sh. Adams and F. el-Shaboury, re-excavated the Cachette in 1955-1957 and found some additional objects, their excavation report was also doomed to be lost. In any event, the Karnak Cachette database offers researchers a body of knowledge that can be easily augmented and refined as new data emerges.

L. Coulon, E. Jambon, November 2010



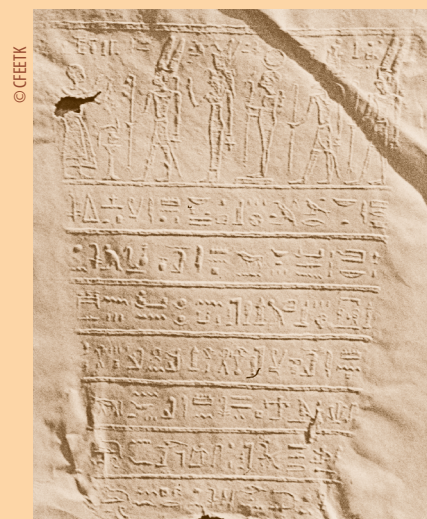
Fragment of divine scepter from the
Karnak Cachette. Cairo S.R. 225.



Ptolemaic statue of a priest found in the Karnak Cachette and now
kept in the basement of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Cairo S.R. 219.

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© CFEETK

Squeeze made by G. Legrain : inscription of the block statue of Horemakhbit (K 289, Ptolemaic Period).



© Archives DAE, Louvre Museum

The excavations in the courtyard of the Cachette in February 1905. Cl. Thedenat collection.



Photograph taken by B. v. Bothmer for the CLES statue of Djedkhonsiuefankh. Cairo CG 48628.



Details of the statue of Iahmes son of Pakharkhons photographed by B. v. Bothmer for the CLES.

*The Karnak Cachette Database program
conducted in cooperation by the IFAO, directed by Dr. Béatrix Midant-Reynes,
and the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt, directed by his Excellency Dr. Zahi Hawass.*

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